# Metro Forum Questions

*Please find below questions raised via e-mail or in person at our July 22 forum. We have tried to edit questions for clarity or to bring similar questions together. All responses are from WMATA. - Roger*

**What progress is being made on improving pedestrian access to stations?**

In February 2011, the Board endorsed the Metrorail Bicycle and Pedestrian Access Improvements study. The study took a comprehensive look at how the organization approached pedestrian and bicycle access to the system and recommended improvements that would yield greater walk and bike access to Metrorail stations. At that time, the Board also adopted bicycle mode share goals for 2020 and 2030, as well as practices to improve pedestrian access around stations that were recommended. Since then, Metro staff has been working to implement the study's recommendations. Highlights have included walk and bike access to Metrorail during peak periods increasing by 15 percent and 54 percent, respectively, during the five years between two recent Metrorail passenger surveys (2007 and 2012) and since Metro increased its focus on walk and bike access planning. Increases in bicycle access have Metro on track to meet Board bicycle mode share goals established in 2011, with higher than expected demand at new Silver Line stations helping further that progress. These increases equate to about 23,600 daily trips, or 5.4 million annual trips, and roughly $15 million in fare revenue.

**The air conditioning is either broken or very weak on virtually every train I take. What is being done to address this?**

Over the summer, Metro has had car maintenance technicians strategically deployed throughout the system to quickly address hot cars. When a customer notifies the train operator, the operator can radio ahead to have techs meet the train enroute. Customers can also tell a station manager as they leave the system. Passengers are urged to note the car number and can also report the problem to 202-637-1328. Car numbers are located inside the rail car on the door at either end of the train and also on the exterior of each rail car. Metro tries to shut those cars off as soon as possible and has also stepped maintenance of the system so that there are fewer "hot cars."

**Where are the 8-car trains? It seems like there are mostly 6-car trains, even at rush hour.**

Metro made the decision to temporarily reduce the use of 8-car trains on Mondays and Fridays during summer months in order to provide additional time for car maintenance. This is being done in the interest of providing railcar maintenance personnel with additional time to address railcar issues, as it means that more cars are available for maintenance activity over four consecutive days each week--from Friday through Monday. Mondays and Fridays are the lightest ridership days of the week, especially during summer months. On these days, ridership is about 10 percent lower than Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. These adjustments will conclude at the end of the summer season, around the third week of September.

**The sound system is such that either the operator's voice is so low you can't hear it, or it is deafeningly loud. Are there steps being taken to improve those radios?**

Metro is procuring 748 new railcars (the 7000-series railcar order) to expand the fleet as required to serve the Silver Line extension (128 railcars) and to replace hundreds of railcars in Metro's fleet. These new railcars include automated announcements of next stops, as well as improved speaker systems to improve the sound quality of announcements made by operators.

**When is the Red Line shutdown occurring? What are the changes being made during the shutdown? How will this impact riders?**

Work executed in support of the Purple Line and Bethesda Station connection and WMATA's Red 2.1 project will be executed during weekend shutdowns, weekend single tracking and non-revenue hours. WMATA will deliver the same level of accommodations to support our customers during these service interruptions as has been customary over the past few years. Although subject to change based on WMATA's desire to execute the Purple Line work at the Bethesda Station and the work associated with WMATA's Red 2.1 project simultaneously, WMATA's current schedule calls for construction to take place between Friendship Heights and Grosvenor throughout calendar year 2017 and 2018.

The scope of work executed under WMATA's Red 2.1 project is primarily state of good repair in nature and includes the mitigation of water intrusion at the Medical Center crossover, Grosvenor aerial structure retrofit, platform and canopy rehabilitation at Grosvenor and other tunnel segment component replacements

**When is the Bethesda Station makeover occurring? Are the changes all cosmetic or is there going to be a functional change to the station?**

Metro is prioritizing the functional improvements at Bethesda – other station enhancements that are more cosmetic in nature are being deferred in Metro's 6-year capital improvement program.

Specific improvements that have already occurred at Bethesda include the two new escalators from the mezzanine to the platform levels. These new escalators included the stainless steel cladding, updating the look while using a durable material. Prior to the escalator replacement, Metro also installed new stairs to the platform – this stairwell area is illuminated with the latest type of light fixtures that Metro is adding to our stations.

To gain efficiencies and minimize disruption to our riders, the execution of additional Bethesda Station improvements will be coordinated with the advancement of the Purple Line project. WMATA intends to execute all work in support of the Bethesda Station connection to the Purple Line which falls within the physical limits of WMATA's existing infrastructure. Conceptually, WMATA will add a new mezzanine at the South end of the Bethesda Station in order to facilitate the connection to the Purple Line, which would represent a functional change to the station. All of the work outside of the limits of WMATA's existing infrastructure, to include the new Bethesda entrance and the vertical transportation assets, will be executed by MTA as a part of the Purple Line project.

As WMATA does not control the schedule of the Purple Line project, it is not appropriate for WMATA to suggest a timeline for when this work will occur. However, it is WMATA's position that the Bethesda Station work in support of the Purple Line project be executed simultaneously with the execution of WMATA's Red 2.1 project (Medical Center water leak remediation and other SOGR improvements) in order to maximize production during track outage windows and minimize customer impact. WMATA's schedule for the Red 2.1 project indicates a notice to proceed issued to the Design-Build Contractor in the mid-Spring of 2016.

**What is the Priority Corridor Network? What are the PCN routes in Montgomery County? What benefits will those routes have for Montgomery commuters? When should we expect to see them?**

The Metrobus Priority Corridor Network is a strategy for improving bus service in the Washington region quickly and efficiently. It will provide a flexible plan that can be implemented in stages, with immediate payoff. The Metrobus Priority Corridor Network will improve bus service travel times, reliability, capacity, productivity and system access. The plan includes 24 corridors across the region and will impact half of all bus riders in the current Metrobus system.

Montgomery County routes include: University Boulevard (J1, J2, J3, J4), Sixteenth Street (S1, S2, S4, S9), Veirs Mill Road (Q1, Q2, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q9), New Hampshire Avenue (K6, K9), Georgia Avenue (Y5, Y7, Y8, Y9), Greenbelt (C2, C4), East-West Highway (F4, F6), and Colesville Road (Z2, Z6, Z8, Z9, Z29, Z11, Z13).

WMATA has concluded that not only would the PCN provide significant ridership benefits and attract over 100,000 new riders, but it would also provide significant system capacity increases, regional-level evaluation of the PCN system, and corridor level evaluations on guideway configurations, traffic and environmental impacts, cost estimates, and travel-time savings. Montgomery country riders can expect to benefit from the new multimodal Silver Spring Station transit center, greater use of articulated buses, special branded vehicles for limited-stop service, new improved shelters with benches and lighting, with installation and activation of next-bus arrival displays.

**When will the second escalator at the bus station entrance of the Friendship Heights Metro Station be back in operation?**

The anticipated completion date is December, 2015. You can get detailed information about any escalator online here: http://www.wmata.com/rider_tools/metro_service_status/elevator_escalator.cfm?

**When will the escalator project at Bethesda be complete?**

Each escalator will require approximately 42 weeks for site preparation, demolition, construction, installation and testing. Replacing all three escalators in succession will take a total of about 2 ½ years. The first of three new entrance escalators at Metro's Bethesda Station entered service on Monday, August 3, representing a major milestone for the project. With a rise of 106 feet, the new escalator is the second longest in the Western Hemisphere (behind Wheaton Station).

**What, if any, are Metro's plans for expanding and improving access for those entering the Friendship Heights station from the Maryland side?**

Metro has identified thirteen stations that are most in need of capital improvements to improve station access and internal circulation of passengers. These stations are primarily in the core, where ridership is highest, but also includes end-of-the-line stations such as New Carrollton and Shady Grove. Friendship Heights has not been identified as one of these stations most in need of improved access.

**Why is Bethesda station bypassed when there is an escalator closure?**

Decisions to bypass Bethesda in the event of an escalator outage are made on a case by case basis. Before embarking on the 2½ year project to replace the three long entrance escalators, Metro developed an emergency management plan that included additional staffing by both Metro Transit Police and escalator technicians. In the event of an escalator outage, transit police begin monitoring station crowding to assess whether any overcrowding would necessitate that the station be bypassed by Metrorail. For safety reasons we require an ascending escalator be running and a descending escalator

running/or available as a walker to avoid a closure. Such a decision is also informed by on-site escalator technicians who can often predict the duration of an escalator outage.

**Who should residents call if they see any safety, crime-related or maintenance issues on the system?**

In an emergency riders can press the help button located inside of train cars or call Metro Transit Police at (202) 962-2121. Additionally, riders can send tips about suspicious activities or other non-emergencies by sending a text to MyMTPD (696873).

For maintenance issues riders are urged to note the car number and report the problem to 202-637-1328. Riders can also notify a station manager or any other Metro employee.

**With concerns about safety on the system high after the stabbing on the Red Line, what does Metro Police do to keep riders safe on a daily basis?**

The MTPD has an authorized strength of 490 sworn police officers, 64 security special police, and 91 civilian personnel. Officers provide a variety of law enforcement and public safety services on the Metrorail and Metrobus systems in the Washington Metropolitan Area. MTPD police officers have jurisdiction and arrest powers throughout the 1,500 square mile Transit Zone that includes Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia for crimes that occur in or against Transit Authority facilities. The Mission of the MTPD is to provide protection for Metro patrons, personnel, transit facilities, and revenue.

**What is Metro's protocol to clean stations? The walls, especially at such large stations as L'Enfant Plaza and Chinatown, are filthy and this also contributes to the darkness that permeates the stations. Power-washing is cheap and it contributes a great deal to the quality of passenger experience.**

Metro strives to provide a clean station environment, free of litter and other debris that can detract from the customer experience. The more thorough cleaning of station walls and surfaces is performed on rolling, continuous basis. Each year, Metro performs mini and major rehabilitations, including the following stations for the current fiscal year:

**Major Rehabs**

Braddock Road
King Street
Silver Spring
NoMa/Gallaudet U
Dunn Loring
Clarendon
Crystal City
Anacostia
Waterfront
Takoma
Largo Town Center
Morgan Boulevard

**Mini Rehabs**

Huntington
Greenbelt
Cheverly
National Airport
Foggy Bottom
Farragut West
Federal Triangle
Navy Yard
Stadium Armory
Van Dorn
Rhode Island Ave
Grosvenor

During these rehabilitations, personnel perform a wide array of cleaning and repairs:

- Clean and Repair Masonry Surfaces
- Repair Metal Components
- Paint Interior Surfaces
- Spot Refinish Bronze Surfaces
- Fabricate and Repair/Replace Graphics
- Refinish Bus and Platform Shelter Benches
- Resurface wooden benches and apply clear coating

**WMATA promised that repair staff would be present at the Bethesda Metro station to ensure the upkeep and repair of the two working escalators. Why do they continue to break down, leading to trains bypassing the station?**

Metro decided to replace the three long escalators at Bethesda because the existing, original units at the station suffered from poor reliability and were nearing the end of their useful life. Recognizing that having one escalator permanently out of service because it was being replaced, Metro decided to keep staff present at all hours the station is open in order to quickly troubleshoot any issues with the two remaining escalators.

There are numerous reasons that an escalator can go out of service. Recently at Bethesda, a foreign object became lodged in the comb plate of the new escalator, leading to a partial dismantling of the equipment and a need to bypass the station. On a different day, there was a problem with one of the steps on the new escalator, requiring the contractor who installed the escalator to replace that step. Escalators also have safety switches that can inadvertently be activated by customers – those situations can usually be quickly repaired and would not lead to the station being bypassed.

**Numerous riders have raised concerns regarding the communications they receive from Metro operators during delays. Does Metro review these messages and is there a way to better inform riders with more specific details when issues arise?**

Metro works hard to communicate with passengers in a number of ways – prior to entering the station with MetroAlerts, our email/text message notification system, TV screens hanging on every station kiosk prior to entering through the fare gates, messaging on the Next Train signs (internally called Passenger Information Displays or PIDS), and station public address announcements.

Metro also understands the importance of Train Operator announcements to customers, especially when trains are being held for a delay. It is instilled in every Operator, at all levels of training, to keep passengers informed with announcements and provided scripts in their training materials. Recently, there was an initiative to review and enhance these announcement scripts. These enhancements include a more detailed reason and specific action being taken for a particular train (Operator exiting cab to troubleshoot, asked to hold by Central Control, waiting for a single tracking train to pass, etc). We continue to coach and train Operators and Directors on these enhanced announcements. The Transportation Group continues to work closely with the Maintenance Group to ensure PA systems are functional in every in-service trainset, and fix trends we find. Any specific observations are welcomed and we will investigate reports of announcement or equipment failure.

**When is a "delay" communication warranted? What can be done to improve these messages from train operators? How about telling riders the approximate time it will take to address the issue and where the next train is?**

Delay communications vary based on the incident. Under most circumstances – like a disabled train – in-station announcements begin almost immediately (within 3 minutes) at the station of the incident or two stations between an incident. These communications acknowledge a problem in audio and visual form locally, and usually suggest in audio form where the next train is on the line. As the incident time escalates (5-7 minutes) additional audio/visual messages are pushed to surrounding stations from an incident, advising to expect delays. At the 8-10 minute mark, a MetroAlert is pushed – communicating delay information via email/text – and all affected line stations receive an audio/visual message, including the TV screens prior to entering the system. If an incident is more severe (person struck by train, infrastructure failure), the timeline is accelerated with all messaging happening within 5 minutes of confirming an incident. Rail Controllers and Train Operators work in tandem to inform each other and Train Operators are then trained to use the scripted announcements to communicate with customers. We supplement severe incidents with delay estimates as best we can in order to provide the best information in these very fluid situations.

Metro is constantly reviewing our communication processes, training and coaching front-line employees, and enhancing our practices to create a more informed experience for our riders.

**How does Metro respond to the public during delays, emergencies, and maintenance periods? Does Metro monitor media stories and social media posts?**

Through MetroAlerts, riders can be notified of Metro service disruptions via email or text messages. MetroAlerts can be sent to computers, smart phones and other cell phones that receive data. MetroAlerts are limited to 140 characters to prevent them from being truncated when received as text messages. If further information on the incident is available, it is published on this website and a link to that information is included in the MetroAlert.

**What percentage of Metro employees use the system on a regular basis?**

On any given weekday, approximately 2,650 Metro employees use Metrobus and Metrorail. While this represents just one in five of Metro's 12,600 employees, it should be noted that employee use of Metrobus and Metrorail for commuting varies greatly by job function and location. For example, at WMATA's headquarters offices, located near Gallery Place and Judiciary Square, the majority of employees use Metro to commute. Most headquarters employees work Monday-Friday daytime jobs and there are fewer than 200 employee parking spaces for more than 1,100 employees. On the other hand, at other locations such as bus divisions and rail yards, Metro needs to provide enough parking so that most employees for each shift of can drive to work. Work shifts for mechanics, operators, station managers, maintenance staff and many other job functions often begin or end beyond the hours of the bus and rail system. Metro encourages employees to use Metrobus and Metrorail, and in fact, complementary travel on bus and rail is touted as an employee benefit in workforce recruitment (employees are required to pay to park at Metro parking facilities).

**When trains have to single track, what are the operational procedures in place to handle train flow? It often seems that single tracking is handled on an ad-hoc basis rather than systematically.**

Operational procedures for single tracking vary based upon whether the single tracking is in place to support scheduled maintenance or if it is an unscheduled event. During scheduled single tracking, which is usually during the weekend and sometimes on weekdays in the mid-day or late evening, Metro has the capability to adjust train frequency to reduce the dwell time for trains waiting to enter a single track section. Sometimes, depending on the length of the single tracking, trains may not need to wait at all to enter the single track area.

During unscheduled single track events, Metro analyzes a number of factors and the rider experience will likely vary based upon time of day and potentially the direction of travel. Metro places the priority on minimizing the overall delays experienced by riders and maximizing the ability to get trains through a single track area. During peak periods, this sometimes requires trains to skip stops in order more efficiently pass through a single track section. In such situations, some riders would be required to go beyond their stop and take a train in the opposite direction back to their destination.

**Is there a better way to inform riders of the progress made during the weekend track work that causes delays to the system? What have been the positive impacts of the weekend work that has been going on recently?**

MetroAlerts keep customers informed of service information on your desktop email or mobile device. MetroAlerts delivers alert and advisory information to up to two email addresses. Alerts are sent for unexpected changes to Metrorail, Metrobus, or MetroAccess service. Advisories are issued for planned service changes, including schedule adjustments or long-term repairs. During weekend closures, Metro employees and contractors work on multiple projects at the same time. Examples include:

- *NTSB-recommended track circuit replacements*
- *Replacement of track ties*
- *Switch replacement or improvements*
- *Rail and fastener replacement and joint elimination for a smoother ride*
- *Third-rail repairs and upgrades*

- *Water and leak mitigation*
- *Station platform reconstruction*
- *Radio and cellular communication improvements*
- *Rail facility upgrades*
- *Station cleaning*

**Why do we see continued reliability issues despite the extensive time that tracks are put out of service?**

Delays and reliability issues on the rail system are usually the result of three main factors: 1) problems with the track infrastructure; 2) rail fleet issues; or 3) external causes such as a sick customer, suspicious package, etc. Metro's extensive efforts to replace rail, fasteners and other critical infrastructure has mitigated the number of times that delays have been caused by rail infrastructure problems, but Metro is still addressing a backlog of maintenance and will continually need to take tracks out of service to maintain a state of good repair and renew components on a lifecycle basis. For the rail fleet, Metro has ordered 748 7000-series rail cars. 32 of these rail cars are in service – as more new rail cars enter service and Metro retires its least reliable rail cars, reliability will improve. Finally, while the decision to add a fire department liaison to the Rail Operation Control Center was focused on improving safety, this increased level of coordination may also help to more efficiently address incidents that involve fire and EMS response within the rail system.

**What is Metro doing to attract qualified employees on all levels and how does it ensure that they are getting the most out of its staff?**

Attracting Qualified Candidates

Metro leverages a multi-faceted sourcing to attract the most qualified candidates across all job functions. Beyond standard job postings, recruitment advertisements and screening those applicants seeking employment, Metro has a team of certified professional recruiters who employ candidate sourcing strategies to attract candidates who may not be currently in market but have the desired skills, work experience and credentials Metro is seeking. These strategies include, but are not limited to, engagement of strategic sourcing and employment partnerships, professional networking, community and niche skilled outreach, social media and advanced internet mining techniques. For the most senior level positions and/or scarce skill or hard to fill positions, third party executive search firms may also be leveraged.

Performance Management

Metro's performance management system gauges employee performance annually against organizational objectives and associated behaviors. The performance management system is robust and ensures annual performance management plans, mid-year conversations, and final appraisals are developed and completed in support of Metro's pay for performance compensation model.

**I believe the methods of payment currently offered are satisfactory as is. What is the purpose of phasing out the paper card method and introducing a new method to the system?**

Metro is steadily transitioning away from the use of 1970's-era magnetic paper farecard technology. The machinery used to process paper farecards is outmoded and includes an intricate

system of rollers, printers, sensors, and wiring that is difficult and time consuming to maintain when compared to the contactless SmarTrip® technology. Today, more than 90 percent of all Metrorail riders already use a SmarTrip® card to pay for their trip. Eliminating paper farecards has several benefits for riders and for Metro, including:

- **Faster entry/exit for all riders.** Riders who tap SmarTrip® cards pass through the gates faster than those who use paper farecards. When all riders use SmarTrip®, there will be fewer backups at faregates, especially during major events such as Nationals games, Fourth of July, Inauguration and Cherry Blossom season.
- **More reliable fare gates.** The machinery inside fare gates that rolls, scans, prints and captures paper farecards is intricate and requires frequent maintenance. It is also 1970's technology. Discontinuing its use will mean more faregates in service, more of the time. It will also reduce expenses for Metro.
- **It's better for the environment.** Last year, Metro dispensed 14.8 million paper farecards. If laid end-to-end, the line of farecards would run from Washington, DC past Chicago, IL. Reusable SmarTrip® cards reduce this waste, and tourists and riders get a more durable souvenir.

**When will Metro expand the Shady Grove Metro Station? The platform is too small for the amount of people that use it during peak hours and on holiday weekends.**

In 2011, Metro completed a Shady Grove Station Access Improvement Study to analyze alternatives for improving passenger flow within the station as well as external access to Shady Grove. As anticipated, one of the findings was excessive passenger queuing in the PM peak period. With new development in the area and the potential for new ridership from the future Corridor Cities Transitway, in its Momentum plan, Metro has identified Shady Grove as a station in need of capacity improvements. While the platform itself cannot feasibly be expanded, the plan calls for additional vertical circulation (i.e. elevators, escalators, stairs) to improve passenger flow. Presently, however, funding to improve capacity at Shady Grove is not included in WMATA's six-year Capital Improvement Program. Jurisdictions will be meeting this fall to develop a new Capital Funding Agreement for the next six years; addressing such capacity expansion will be one of a number of priorities that the region will consider.

**With regard to safety and emergency personnel that work on and with Metro rail systems, what changes are being made to ensure the safety of customers? Recent issues with communications have been brought to light – how are WMATA & regional first responders responding to these concerns?**

In July, Metro announced the addition of a full-time fire/rescue liaison in its Rail Operations Control Center. This addition will provide a uniformed fire officer in the "nerve center" of the Metrorail system 40 hours a week to help coordinate emergency communication between Metro and first responders. The newly created position is the result of ongoing discussions between Metro and the region's fire chiefs. In addition to coordinating emergency response, the fire official will also develop policy recommendations and provide supplemental emergency training for rail controllers. Launched on July 1, 2015, the position is part of an agreement with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Fire Chiefs Committee.

In response to the January 12 incident that occurred in a tunnel near L'Enfant Plaza Station earlier this year, Metro has implemented a number of additional safety measures to improve emergency

response, including increased training, emergency drills and enhanced radio testing protocols that provide a real time outage map for controllers and first responders.

**What are plans and possibilities for expanding the span of train service and also the frequency of bus service?**

There are no current plans for expanding the span of Metrorail service. Metrorail opens at 5AM on weekdays and 7AM on weekends and closes at 12AM Sunday-Thursday and 3AM Friday-Saturday. The overnight hours that the system is closed to riders is crucial for system maintenance and addressing a backlog of state-of-good repair needs.

Improving the frequency of bus service is more feasible, but still requires additional investment form the jurisdictions that fund Metro. For service in Montgomery County, Metro receives funding from the Maryland Department of Transportation. Additionally, Metro periodically makes recommendations to adjust bus service and modify routes to better align bus service with development and demand – this Better Bus initiative is open for public comment until September 23 at 5PM.

**What is the current progress towards cell phone service in the tunnels?**

After the company hired by the four major wireless companies to install the wireless network in Metro's tunnels went bankrupt, the carriers are diligently working with Metro to resume this critical project.

**What is the status of long term capacity improvements, like additional tunnel for Rosslyn crossing, separated Blue Line and core connections?**

In 2014, Metro's Office Planning prepared a report to evaluate alternative options for improving Blue Line connections. Adding a second Rosslyn station could serve as a precursor for an additional crossing of the Potomac. Funding for such improvements has not been identified.

**What can be done to keep fares constant or maybe even bring them down?**
**Is there consideration being made to increase subsidies to increase ridership?**

Current WMATA Board policy is to adjust fares every two years based upon inflation. This policy was adopted in 2008 after Metro had gone four years without a fare increase. The basic rationale for the Board policy was that that smaller, more regular fare increases would be more manageable for riders. Based upon this existing Board policy, the next scheduled fare increase would take effect in Fiscal Year 2017, which begins July 1, 2016.

There is concern that as Metro fares have become more expensive, current and potential riders have chosen alternative means of transportation. As the WMATA Board of Directors considers the 2017 budget and changes to fares, the impact on ridership will be a key consideration.